

Legislation Details (With Text)

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PRESENTER:

Stacey Dicke, Parks and Recreation Director

SUBJECT:

San Antonio Street Bridge Historic Display

DISCUSSION:

When the San Antonio Street Bridge was renovated, TxDOT directed the city to preserve a section of the historic railing to use in an interpretive display. Staff has worked on plans on where to locate the display along with an example layout. Luck Design Team is currently working on construction plans for the installation which should be completed this fall.



CROSSING THE COMAL



Crossing the Comal River and linking New Braunfels and Comaltown was an important, but challenging obstacle. When New Braunfels was established in 1845, there was no safe or reliable way across the Comal River. The river was unpredictable. Connecting the town sites would help local business, but it was also important for the region. New Braunfels is on the route between San Antonio and Austin and many businesspeople and visitors traveled through.

The first bridge between New Braunfels and Comaltown was the Pecan Bridge—simply a pair of cut down pecan trees.



In 1851, operators of the Torrey Mill agreed to build and maintain a wooden footbridge across the Comal River.

New Braunfels built the first wagon bridge in 1856—a wooden structure between Mill Street and San Antonio Street. The city rebuilt it in 1866 and repaired it in 1869 after floods. It collapsed after another flood in 1870.

In 1871, the city spent \$15,000 (that's almost \$325,000 today) to install a new iron bridge in the same location as the former wagon bridge. In June 1872, a devastating flood destroyed it.



Shortly after the 1872 flood, a local merchant named Carl Floege built a low-water bridge at the foot of the San Antonio Street. The Floege Bridge served New Braunfels travelers for nearly 20 years.

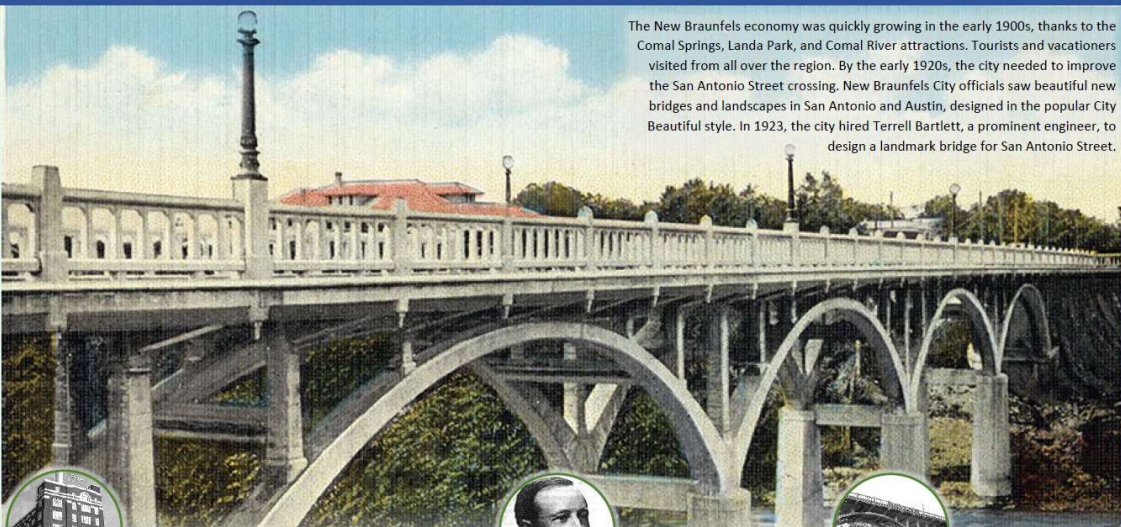


In 1894, the Chicago Bridge and Iron Company installed a bridge using iron that came from the Chicago World's Fair. Fortunately, this iron bridge survived floods and it remained in use for almost 30 years.



The city hired Terrell Bartlett to build the 1923 concrete arch bridge. It is the longest-lasting bridge across the Comal River in New Braunfels. In 2019, when it was time to make repairs, TxDOT saved the original arches and rebuilt a stronger and wider roadway on top.

VISION FOR A "CITY BEAUTIFUL"



The New Braunfels economy was quickly growing in the early 1900s, thanks to the Comal Springs, Landa Park, and Comal River attractions. Tourists and vacationers visited from all over the region. By the early 1920s, the city needed to improve the San Antonio Street crossing. New Braunfels City officials saw beautiful new bridges and landscapes in San Antonio and Austin, designed in the popular City Beautiful style. In 1923, the city hired Terrell Bartlett, a prominent engineer, to design a landmark bridge for San Antonio Street.



City Beautiful Movement

The City Beautiful Movement lasted from about 1895 to 1930. During that time, cities across the country were expanding, but they were often crowded and dirty. Planners and architects believed that beautiful parks, avenues, bridges, and buildings would improve the lives of people living in cities. City Beautiful supporters thought that Classical and orderly design would inspire citizens to take pride in their city and live proper and balanced lives. The Comal Power Plant in New Braunfels (pictured) is a local example of City Beautiful architecture. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Terrell Bartlett

Bartlett was already a successful and well-known engineer when New Braunfels hired him for the San Antonio Street bridge. He was a skilled engineer and an expert in hydrology—the study of how water moves on land. By the time he retired, he designed and supervised over 55 bridges projects in South Texas, including landmarks like the 1912 Galveston Causeway.



San Antonio Street Bridge

Bartlett designed a bridge that would embrace the natural beauty of the Comal River. Graceful concrete arches and open columns would make the bridge look light and airy. The symmetry and order would inspire people traveling over and under the bridge. The grand structure would be a landmark for the residents of New Braunfels.

Back When the Falls Were Stinky

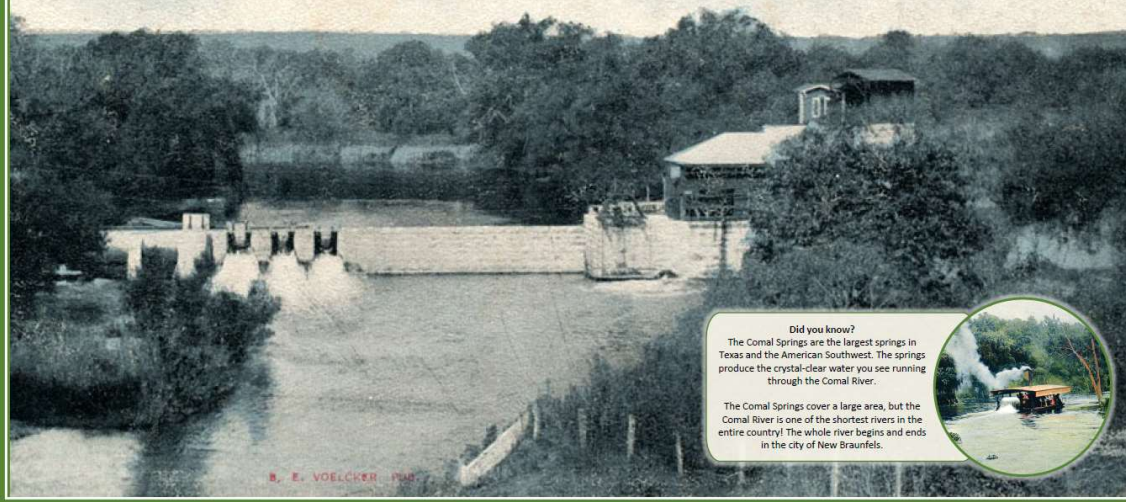


In the early 1900s, enterprising businessmen searched the Comal Springs for pure drinking water to supply New Braunfels residents. In 1907, William Clemens Jr. drilled a well next to the Clemens Dam, in search of pure water. What he found instead provided the area with a nickname (and a rotten-egg smell) for nearly 70 years.

Stinky Falls
Clemens drilled right into hot, smelly, sulfur water. The new hot springs became a popular swimming spot, particularly for local residents. There weren't many attractions on this part of the river during the first half of the 1900s. Tourists visited upriver in Landa Park, or downriver in Camp Warneke.

Besides the lack of activities, who would want to swim in an area that smelled like rotten eggs?

Tube Chute
In 1970, New Braunfels purchased several plots of land from William Clemens Jr.'s descendants, including the Clemens Dam, Stinky Falls, and the land that would become Prince Solms Park. The city capped the sulfur well with the New Braunfels Tube Chute and opened the park in 1977. The chute was immediately popular, and it is still a fun destination today.



Did you know?
The Comal Springs are the largest springs in Texas and the American Southwest. The springs produce the crystal-clear water you see running through the Comal River.

The Comal Springs cover a large area, but the Comal River is one of the shortest rivers in the entire country! The whole river begins and ends in the city of New Braunfels.



RECOMMENDATION:
N/A